

Volume 14 / Issue: 01 (28) / 2026	Received: 26 / 06 / 2026	Accepted: 29 / 06 / 2026	Published: 30 / 06 / 2026	Pages: 295– 312
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**Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles
and Values in the Society**

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Abstract:

This qualitative study analyzes the evolution, social perceptions, and impact of Algerian women's participation in urban peaceful protests from the colonial era to the contemporary Hirak. Drawing on intersectional and social movement theories, the study reveals a dichotomy in feminist activism between spontaneous, livelihood-driven protests and structured movements seeking systemic legislative change. Crucially, the presence of women in urban public spaces injects a powerful moral and peaceful symbolism that disrupts state repression and mobilizes broader family-based solidarity. Ultimately, the study concludes that women's historic activism is a primary driver of national cohesion and social reform, recommending that policymakers institutionalize women's active citizenship, secure urban spaces against social stigma, and integrate women into leadership and urban crisis management rather than confining them to purely symbolic roles.

Keywords: Woman, Role, Demonstrations, Peaceful Protests, Social conditions, Cohesion of National Unity, Society.

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The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

■ **Introduction:**

Women's participation has manifested itself in diverse ways, encompassing social, political, economic, religious, environmental, cultural, and artistic spheres. In short, women, as active social agents operating within their diverse social positions, have always played distinctive roles in building their societies. This includes their political and military resistance to liberate and protect their homelands, their struggle within political and social change movements, their party affiliations, their aspiration to leadership roles and high-ranking positions in the state, alongside their inherent role in communities and their daily struggles. However, despite their value and status within the family and society, and their active role in building society, improving social conditions, and maintaining national unity, women have historically faced oppression, persecution, marginalization, systematic ignorance, the curtailment of their roles, and attacks on their social standing. They have also been targeted by various forms of aggression aimed at destabilizing states, societies, and the family structure.

Women's participation in protest movements, and specifically through the act of protest itself, represents a struggle for legitimacy that women have fought hard to achieve, especially since their voices were suppressed until recently in various parts of the world. In Western countries, for example, women have historically lacked the right to vote, the right to participate in demonstrations, the right to university education, the right to manage their own property, and the right to practice medicine, in addition to other forms of gender discrimination. According to Michael Mann, the term "gender" refers to "the roles of men and women in society, where the social structure of sex is subject to biological considerations." This term entered the sociological lexicon through feminist works and studies. American feminist researchers, particularly in history and anthropology, used this term to distinguish between biological sex and social gender. They rejected the theory of biological determinism and sought to draw attention to the variable of social construction (Munad, Samira, et al. (2020), pp. 193–203).

Although women's participation in legitimate, peaceful demonstrations, and specifically their organization of purely women's protests, is a relatively recent phenomenon, once women reclaimed their right to express themselves in the streets and raised their voices to demand their rights, they mastered this space and utilized it to its fullest potential. They have left an indelible mark through their participation in peaceful popular, professional, and political protests addressing the issues of their communities, as well as international solidarity demonstrations with oppressed

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

peoples and global issues of common concern, such as economic and environmental crises. They have also organized demonstrations addressing issues specific to their communities, such as gender equality, women's rights, and gender-based violence—an area in which the feminist movement has specialized, when women participate in such events, they do so from their position as sisters, daughters, or wives, carrying with them this specific social role.

This means that their role contributes directly to the dimensions of legitimate, peaceful demonstrations; their participation lends significant weight to the protest. Their presence inspires hope, commands respect and empathy, raises the level of perseverance, resilience, and defiance, and inspires high expectations. In short, women's participation in legitimate, peaceful street demonstrations is an extension of their engagement in social life, reflecting the nature of social relations, prevailing moral and religious standards, and the status of women in that society.

Moreover, women's protest behavior constitutes a means of conveying messages of rebellion, moving from the private sphere to the public sphere: "Here, bodies become instruments for conveying ideological ideas" (Sayed Faris (2023), p.320). This behavior also indicates that protesting women refuse to remain in the shadow of men. Indeed, they strive to stand with them at the heart of events (Sayed Faris (2023), p.314). Through this, they play an active role in improving the social conditions that protests and social movements seek to address, ultimately strengthening national unity. It will also be a key target for opponents, who can use it to cast doubt on, weaken, or alienate the protest movement by spreading rumors that tarnish its image and, consequently, the image of its members. They can also launch campaigns of violence, arrest, and torture against women to intimidate them and deter other women from participating in the protest movement.

Algerian women, too, participate in all kinds of legitimate peaceful demonstrations. They have taken to the streets, sometimes in support of their fellow Algerians and sometimes in their own demonstrations. This has been the case since the 20th century, when they participated in all political demonstrations against French colonialism. Since that era, Algerian women have never ceased to participate in, and even organize, legitimate peaceful street demonstrations.

Hence, the central questions arise: **What is the role of women in peaceful demonstrations and protests? And how do they contribute, through this participation, to improving societal conditions and strengthening national unity?**

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
--	--	--	-------------------------

▪ **First: The Role of Women in Peaceful Demonstrations and Protests:**

1. Characteristics of Female Demonstrators in Peaceful Demonstrations and Protests:

Two categories of female demonstrators can be observed: The first category includes women who find themselves compelled or spontaneously drawn to legitimate peaceful protest in the streets, including Arab streets. They adopt the role of demonstrator in demonstrations whose demands may be general, related to the common good of society, or driven by specific grievances that prompted them to join these marches or sit-ins. These issues include domestic violence, violence against women, amending family laws, demanding housing and employment rights, and denouncing the high cost of living. This occurs despite the restrictions imposed by Arab societies on this social activity when undertaken by women, given that the street remains a public social space that women do not use on an equal footing with men in many societies.

In fact, their presence in it, especially alone at night, is often socially restricted, given the heavy male presence at marches, particularly sit-ins, women face restrictions and obstacles from their families as sisters, mothers, daughters, and even wives. This situation persists despite the fact that international conventions on the right to protest and international constitutions, including those of Arab states, do not differentiate between male and female citizens in exercising the right to demonstrate.

The second category includes those who engage in protest not as a spontaneous, incidental, or temporary event that ends with the conclusion of the demonstration or the authorities' response to their specific demands, but rather as part of a broader protest movement. As Alain Touraine defines it in his book "The Production of Society," it is an element and a method among the elements and methods of a social movement. It is an act of protest undertaken by one group against another, centered on a specific, existentially imperative issue, within the framework of the historical system of action (Ashti & Fares (2011), p. 151).

in all its stages—from mobilization, coordination, and framing to preparing for the demonstration and participating on the ground. All of this occurs within a broader context: its integration into a social movement addressing wider societal issues, or specific women's issues, which is known as the feminist movement. At its core, the social movement is seen as a space of freedom for girls and women, where the constraints of isolation and gender segregation—which activists consider sterile—dissipate, especially since the ultimate goal remains social change (Sayed & Fares (2023), p. 321).

Charles Tilly defines social movements as those interactions that form a continuous chain between those in power and individuals who speak on behalf of a largely unrepresented popular base, carrying clear demands for change in the distribution or exercise of power, supported by public demonstrations (Tilly, Charles (2004), p. 15). Whether these demands are met or some remain unmet, the accumulation of these demonstrations and the increasing pressure on relevant institutions over time will contribute to their resolution.

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

Consequently, women, through their participation in these demonstrations, make a clear contribution to solving social and economic problems, and even participate in shaping laws in various fields, particularly those related to family law.

Furthermore, women's participation in demonstrations is an act of defiance and resilience, making them direct targets of the opposition, especially in countries with repressive regimes. These regimes resort to indirect methods, such as inciting violence against them, or direct methods, such as field repression involving violence, beatings, and humiliation during arrest, to weaken their morale, deter them from participating, and intimidate other women to prevent them from joining, thus reducing the number of participants. Even deviants who infiltrate demonstrations exploit the presence of women and young girls to harass them. Opponents of any social movement also target participating women to tarnish the movement's image by spreading rumors that defame their honor and the honor of the other participants.

Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of violence against female demonstrators in recent times occurred during the **"Yellow Vest"** protests in Paris in 2013, where cases of women being dragged and beaten by riot police were documented. Similarly, in 2024, during protests organized by Americans on US university campuses in support of Palestine and in opposition to the genocide perpetrated by the Zionist entity in Gaza with the support of the US government, students and professors, including women, were subjected to violence. During the series of peaceful revolutions in the Arab world between 2011 and 2014, repression against them reached the point of murder.

According to **Helma Lutz et al.'s** intersectional theory, "systems of oppression intersect and intertwine across different sectors and classes of society. This implies a correlation between the economic, political, and social causes of oppression. This correlation helps to link distinct social groups into a single category comprising the victims of oppression" (Sayed Faris (2023), p.318). Thus, when the mechanism of oppression is activated, it does not discriminate between women and men. However, despite the smear campaigns targeting their honor, they cling to their legitimate right to peaceful protest, demonstrating a resilience that, in turn, fosters a stronger sense of solidarity among members of the protest or the social movement itself, making their relationships more cohesive and thus reinforcing the structure of their movement. Furthermore, as the protesters' resilience grows, it adds another dimension to the morality of the demonstrations, strengthening the spirit of defiance and steadfastness among all protesters and deepening their commitment to the cause.

2. The Symbolism and role of women in peaceful demonstrations:

Women's participation in peaceful demonstrations carries profound symbolism. Because compelling symbolism is a fundamental cultural feature of social and protest movements—such as iconic figures, events, and images that embody the courage and resilience of activists—movements often focus on these elements to mobilize and attract supporters. On the other hand, female activists are sometimes exploited from within the movements themselves, tasked with mobilizing supporters by leveraging their appearance.

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

Among the most prominent symbols of any movement are iconic figures, including female figures; identifying these figures is an important way to define cultural boundaries and characteristics (Sayed Faris(2023), p. 318).

Thus, their presence presents a visual challenge that attracts attention, and their role has a multifaceted impact on the dynamics of protest, imbuing it with specific values—most notably the command of respect, the promotion of nonviolence, and the instilling of a sense of security and civility. This atmosphere, in turn, attracts entire families to participate. However, all these characteristics remain contingent on the level of tension inherent in the nature of the demonstration and the extent to which the security forces are committed to managing the crowds in a democratic and humane manner.

Alongside the use of symbolism in protest movements, **gender** symbols and their associated cultural meanings and representations—such as honor, chastity, shame, and modesty—are exploited to attract new sympathizers and supporters, particularly women, and to promote the movement's causes. Attacks on female activists are condemned, transforming sexuality into a polemical tool used to incite action based on the violation of women's private and hidden world, and thus the violation of notions of honor and chastity. One manifestation of using gender as a weapon in the struggle is placing female activists at the forefront of marches, sometimes deliberately to protect participants, and exploiting the physical taboos related to violence and assault that female activists might face in framing the protest. This confuses and embarrasses the adversary, trapping them in a series of dilemmas (Sayed Faris (2023), p. 323). Gender is also a powerful resource for social movements to attract media attention, often achieved by instigating political or quasi-political events (Simon I. Flynn, 2011, cited in Sayed Faris (2023), p. 324).

In terms of roles, women's participation in peaceful demonstrations and protests is no less important or significant than men's. Beyond marching, carrying banners, chanting slogans, and singing songs, women play roles in organizing, coordinating, and mobilizing; preparing banners and leaflets; organizing evaluation meetings; and delivering press statements and interventions. Some also engage in communication with international human rights organizations and negotiate with security leaders and political actors during or after the event. Their presence lends unique characteristics to the demonstration, most notably reinforcing and solidifying the principle of nonviolence among the crowds.

Women have long had a prominent influence on social and peaceful protest movements through their participation, whether spontaneously or as seasoned activists within the movement, leveraging their role to demand improved social conditions—that is, the nature of social and living conditions and ensuring a dignified life for citizens. This, in turn, strengthens social cohesion, which is a fundamental pillar for the continuity of any society and is subject to multiple indicators referenced in United Nations social reports, which aim to achieve social well-being, including health, education, and gender equality in all areas.

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
--	--	--	-------------------------

At the same time, we find that these demonstrations and protests are based on establishing a shared goal among the various segments of society: strengthening the cohesion of national unity. This unity rests on two dimensions: a moral dimension based on the cohesion of the components of society through deepening the social and human bonds that form the social fabric and structure of society, driven by a sense of belonging, patriotism, shared destiny, and a collective desire for coexistence; A material and legal dimension that revolves around the integration of the state on the one hand, and the legislation and enforcement of constitutional, legal and institutional articles that guarantee the preservation of the unity of the people and social units on the other hand, preventing sedition or conflict, punishing threats to that unity, and ensuring the sustainability of coexistence (Al-Joun Center for Studies and Research (2024), p. 5).

▪ **Second: A Historical Overview of Women's Participation in Protests and Social Movements:**

1. Early Manifestations of Women's Participation in Peaceful Demonstrations and Protests:

The beginnings of women's participation in demonstrations as part of protest and social movements date back to the French Revolution, where women fought for their rights, demanding education, work, the right to manage their own property, the right to divorce, civil and legal rights, equality with men, and other demands. For example, on October 5, 1789, between 6,000 and 7,000 Parisian women, known as the "Ladies of the Market," marched towards Versailles to demand that King Louis XVI ratify the abolition of privileges and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which had been approved by the Legislative Assembly (Marion, Pillas (2022)). Specifically, on June 14, 1881, amidst the growth of women's associations, journalist and activist “**Hubertine Auclair**” called on French women to storm the Bastille as a continuation of the 1789 Revolution, with the aim of expanding the scope of human rights to include women.

Following this call, about forty demonstrators, dressed in black, gathered at the site of the former prison. They also succeeded in mobilizing 2,400 people for a march in the Tuileries Gardens to lay a wreath at the statue of the women's rights advocate “**Condorcet**”, just before the outbreak of World War I in June 1914. At that time, the feminist movement consisted of reformist associations and activists from the middle class and also the bourgeoisie, with most of their demands relating to their living and working conditions. They rejected the radical action of street demonstrations, such as the English suffragette movement, which resulted in the imprisonment and arrest of tens of thousands of women since the movement's inception in the late 19th century (Marion, Pillas (2022)).

Women across various countries continued their struggle to achieve their various demands. During the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, the feminist movement emerged, reaching its peak and gaining the attention of the United Nations in the post-World

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

War II era. Among their renewed demands in the 1960s and 1970s was the official recognition of women's contribution to the well-being of the family and society.

2. Women's Historical Participation in Peaceful Demonstrations and Protests:

Through their participation in feminist protests, women's concerns extended beyond their own issues and rights. As active social agents, they also addressed broader societal issues such as security and national unity. Thanks to their skill in street mobilization and demonstrations, no popular demonstration demanding economic or political reforms, sectoral protests, solidarity marches, or anti-war and anti-racism demonstrations were without a prominent female presence, whether in organization, coordination, media coverage, or direct participation. In doing so, women ensured their contribution by making their voices heard, addressing social problems, and preserving social cohesion and national unity.

Women also participated in numerous peaceful demonstrations around the world, such as the recent international solidarity marches with Palestinians protesting the genocide in Gaza (2023/2024). Prior to this, they played a prominent role in the waves of protests that erupted in October 2011 in the United States, Latin America, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings under the banner "United for Global Change and Global Democracy," and in the social and political "Occupy" protests of September 2011 in cities such as London, Frankfurt, Zurich, Wall Street in New York, and São Paulo.

In Islamic and Arab societies, the first documented participation of women in popular demonstrations was recorded in Egypt during the British colonial era in 1919, organized by Saad Zaghloul and his wife Safia Zaghloul, Huda Shaarawi, and a group of Coptic women to reject the British occupation. During these marches, other slogans were raised, and women chanted for freedom and removed their veils (Qasim, Abdel Aziz, 2002, p. 136). This demonstration is considered one of the first demonstrations that highlighted the feminist awakening, as women began to participate in public and political affairs in Egyptian society. Through three women's political demonstrations during that period, they demonstrated their national awareness and courage; the third march was particularly remarkable for its size, the diversity of its participants, and its organization, to the point that despite the huge number, no legal violations or misconduct were recorded despite the mixing of the sexes (Al-Hilal (1919), pp. 847-849).

To this day, women in Arab societies continue to participate in and organize peaceful demonstrations. Through this engagement, they advocate for diverse issues affecting society, contributing to social change, addressing social problems, preserving national unity, and resisting the oppression, torture, and social stigma they face when participating in mixed-gender protests, especially sit-ins. During these demonstrations, their roles have varied, ranging from organizing and coordinating to mobilizing, encouraging resilience, and emphasizing the principle of nonviolence despite difficult circumstances. They have also collectively confronted attempts to target them as protesters. It is worth noting that their

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

most prominent participation in the recent Arab popular protests began in Tunisia in late 2010 and evolved into the "Arab Spring" revolutions, whose primary demand was the overthrow of corrupt regimes, similar to the "color revolutions" in Eastern Europe in the early 2000s, where women also played a significant role.

▪ **Third: Women's and Feminist Demonstrations in Algerian Cities:**

1. A Historical Overview of Algerian Women's Participation in Peaceful Demonstrations and Their Contribution to Improving Social Conditions and National Unity:

As the thinker Malek Bennabi explained, women's participation in peaceful demonstrations, which addressed societal concerns and those specific to women, aimed to improve social conditions, family stability, and social cohesion, was vital. He called for the establishment of an Algerian feminist movement, emphasizing that "our feminist movements must have our own distinct character, not be artificially imposed from abroad. Women, after all, are not beings who live in isolation and raise their problems on the margins of society; rather, they are one of its two poles, the other being man. We cannot imagine the separation of one pole from the other; if this were to happen, even if it were merely a hypothetical scenario, society would vanish" (Menad, Samira, et al.(2020), pp. 261-275).

"Menad, Samira "considers that the feminist movement in Algeria officially emerged in 1947 with the founding of the first women's association, the Association of Algerian Muslim Women. Since independence, activists have strived to maintain their presence, raise their voices, and demand their rights. Like any global feminist movement, they have often been viewed with hostility. "Nafissa Lahrech", a feminist activist, journalist, former parliamentarian, and president of the Women in Communication Association, points to the contribution of feminist civil society in Algeria to the enactment of laws, such as the amendment to the penal code criminalizing violence against women in December 2015, and her founding of the magazine "Anoutha" in the 1990s. During that period, activists took to the streets to protest for amendments to the family law, launched petition campaigns, and faced criticism that they wanted to "drag women into the abyss," while an Islamist organization threatened to collect three million signatures to cancel their initiative.

During the popular movement, the feminist movement was viewed from two distinct perspectives: some welcomed its presence or at least did not object to it, while others supported and embraced its demands without reservation. However, the prevailing opinion considered it a movement seeking to impose foreign concepts on the Algerian family and women, making it unwelcome, even though it was tolerated

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
--	--	--	-------------------------

within the movement as long as activists did not make demands deemed a violation of "Algerian society's sanctity."

The first hostile stance against it emerged after things had proceeded smoothly since its participation on March 8, 2019

-During Resistance to French Colonialism

During the French colonization of Algeria, Algerian women participated in popular revolutionary demonstrations across the nation, such as the demonstrations of May 8, 1945, October 17, 1961, December 11, 1960, February 27, 1962, and March 7 and 13, 1962 . In addition, women organized spontaneous protests outside prisons and in cemeteries.

Perhaps their most prominent participation was in the demonstrations of December 11, 1960, where the proportion of Algerian female protesters was substantial—unveiled women, women wearing the traditional Haik, and mothers accompanied by their children and youth in Algerian cities, especially where General de Gaulle landed to promote his "Algerian Algeria" policy and his second scheduled referendum for January 8, 1961. The authors of the Soummam Congress platform on August 20, 1956, had praised their courage.

The demonstrations from December 6 to 16 in major Algerian cities during De Gaulle's visit (December 9–13) coincided with the UN General Assembly session attended by an Algerian delegation, and the global celebration of the 12th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. Algerians of all segments waved Algerian flags and banners with French slogans: "Muslim Algeria,"

Regarding women living in Climat de France, she noted they lived a strictly traditional life; some never went out during the day except in exceptional cases when husbands escorted them to their families . Women emitted ululations (Zaghared), shouted slogans, and tore scarves to manufacture flags. The march was led by an elderly lady who rarely left home; her two sons were imprisoned and another killed. (Boucif, Mekhaled, (2011) pp. 385, 395).

The colonizer met these peaceful demonstrations with brutal force, resulting in 120 to 200 casualties, mostly women, girls, children, adolescents, and the elderly. Following this, President Ferhat Abbas issued an appeal to all Arab nations, drawing attention to the slaughter of unarmed innocents, women, children, and the elderly by French extremists.

Thus, through their participation in these demonstrations, Algerian women exposed the reality of French colonialism to international public opinion, proving the solidarity, cohesion, and unity of the Algerian people behind the FLN to defeat De

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

Gaulle's policies. Her role also contributed to convincing the UN to include the Algerian cause on its agenda and forcing De Gaulle to negotiate with the Algerian Provisional Government (GPRA).

Algerian women also participated in the October 17, 1961 demonstrations in Paris. Following the savage repression of those protests, they courageously organized women's demonstrations on October 20 across various French cities, accompanied by their children and infants, protesting for the release of their husbands and against arbitrary arrests. Mass arrests were launched against female participants (Boucif, Mekhaled, (2011), pp. 385, 395). Once again, Algerian women contributed through peaceful protest—this time from the diaspora—to draw international public opinion to the reality of the French regime, forcing the French side to resume negotiations with the FLN.

-Post-Independence:

In the post-independence period, specifically in December 1981, a demonstration opposing the adoption of the draft Family Code was organized at the Grande Poste square in Algiers, where female freedom fighters (Mudjahidat) participated, raising a banner reading: "No to betraying the principles of the First of November" (Ben Azzouz, Asma, 2022, pp. 8-55).

The first prominent post-independence women's demonstration that captured widespread attention and anticipation was called by Islamist elements within the Islamic Coalition on December 21, 1989, in Algiers. Its purpose was to denounce those demanding the abolition of the Family Code derived from Islamic Sharia. It astonished national and international media, who described it as the largest women's march in Algerian political history (Djellali Belkacem, Mohamed, 2014, p. 38). The crowds grew, and by 3:00 PM, participants exceeded one million. They carried banners with diverse Islamic slogans: "Islam is a religion and a state," "Algeria is our homeland, Islam our religion, Arabic our language," "The Family Code is unalterable," "Record, I am a Muslim woman," and "Allah is my goal, the Prophet my role model, Islam my constitution." The organizers maintained remarkable order as massive waves of women (Djellali Belkacem, Mohamed, 2014, p. 38).

. Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun delivered the opening speech with calm confidence, addressing the female protesters: "...This day is your day and will remain engraved in our nation's history. Islam honored and elevated women, granting them the same rights as their brother man... In Islam, there is no such thing as a 'women's issue' because she complements man just as he complements her..." He warned them against calls aiming to erase their authentic Islamic identity, followed by interventions from female protesters in Arabic, French, and Tamazight, affirming Algerian women's adherence to their religion, authenticity, and civilization. They delivered a petition to the National People's Assembly (APN) deputies demanding the protection of the Muslim family, the actual application of Articles 2 and 9 of the Constitution ("Islam is the religion of the State"), and confronting behaviors contrary to Islamic morality and November 1st values (Djellali Belkacem, Mohamed, (2014), p. 38).

Feminist activists noted that this march, themed "Denouncing the Intensifying Attack on

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
--	---	--	--------------------------------

Islam," was a direct response to feminist movement with slogans like "We are the daughters of Lalla Fatma N'Soumer.

-The Feminist Movement During Political Openness:

Following the state-supervised political openness of 1988, a favorable environment emerged for women's organizations, such as the National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA) and the expansion of new ones. On May 10, 1990, women participated heavily in a march organized by the RCD party and PSD under the banner "Democracy and Tolerance." On January 24, 1991, feminist associations organized a march , declaring: "Our dignity as Algerian women cannot be separated from the dignity of the Algerian people and all peoples generally" (Ben Azzouz, Asma, 2022, pp. 8-55).

The activities of the Algerian feminist movement accumulated, though they consistently complained of structural neglect by public media. . During the March 8, 1990 march, participants raised banners featuring artwork by prominent Algerian painters like Baya, Mesli, and Slim, gifted under the title "Women's Struggle." The March 8, 1991 demonstrations faced repression. At the time, communication and transport required immense effort, limiting activists to distributing leaflets in universities and workplaces (Ben Azzouz, Asma, (2022), pp. 8-55).

Algerian women consistently challenge obstacles facing their change-oriented demonstrations, asserting that their demands reinforce domestic security and do not target the moral fabric of conservative Algerian society, which often views feminist demands as alien, secular, or promotion of moral decay orchestrated by those targeting national components. The feminist movement persists, presenting itself as a struggle for women's rights and takes pride in its ongoing contributions to amending the family code in favor of Algerian women.

Subsequently, numerous political and social demonstrations saw massive female participation as human rights activists, party members, or independent citizens—most notably the Barakat movement protests in 2014 opposing the fourth presidential term. Prior to that, following the "Black Spring" developments of 2001, where massive marches occurred in Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia, Boumerdes, and Bouira to present the Arouch platform demands to the capital following tragic events in April 2001, a women's demonstration was organized in Tizi Ouzou on May 24, 2001, gathering thousands of women across all generations (Boowiki website, n.d.). Through this, Algerian women contributed to improving social conditions whenever protesters' demands were met, improving the living conditions of protesting segments.

2. Algerian Women's Participation in the Peaceful Popular Hirak Demonstrations:

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

Characteristics of Women's Role in the Hirak Demonstrations:

Broadly, the roles of participating women and young girls varied throughout the popular Hirak (February 22, 2019, to May 2021) across all demographics and social statuses—young, old, sisters, mothers, and daughters—acting as protesters, activists, medics, media professionals, and security personnel. As protesters, they occupied the front lines and various spatial coordinates of the protest venues, arriving with families, spouses, children, friends, activist groups, colleagues, or independently; students arrived with peers or student blocs.

Algerian women creatively adorned balconies with the national flag, especially along march routes on Tuesdays and Fridays in central Algiers. Women infuses the marches with ululations, boosting morale and signaling hope and pride in the protest movement and Algeria. Furthermore, women's presence anchored peace, comfort, and respect, causing men to avoid vulgar language; male protesters even formed protective rings around them during street dispersals when force was deployed. The elderly were viewed as a blessing (Barakah) in popular vocabulary; their presence signaled solidarity and support for the youth, fostering hope and confidence in change, as elderly women offered prayers, advice, and encouragement to both protesters and security forces, generating familial warmth and reinforcing social bonds.

Known for their hospitality and generosity, women cooked traditional Couscous at home and served it to protesters on Fridays, while chanting, singing, defending detainees, participating in solidarity sit-ins for prisoners, sharing solutions for the political impasse on-site or via social media, and organizing marches.

However, the most significant female and feminist participation in terms of density and impact occurred during the Hirak protests (2019–2021) aiming to block the fifth presidential term and remove corrupt symbols, while leveraging International Women's Day (March 8) as a repertoire for the Hirak. The first coincided with Friday, March 8, 2019; the second with Sunday, March 8, 2020; and the third with Monday, March 8, 2021. The March 8, 2019 demonstrations served as vital fuel for the protest dynamics, embedding an additional dimension into the Hirak. On that day, the female element anchored its presence irreversibly, bringing families and children into the fold, which reinforced the principle of nonviolence (Silmiya), sending a clear domestic and international message that peacefulness was a structural ethos, not a mere slogan.

Women would join in mass—materialized across all national cities, transforming the streets into a festival heralding a "New Algeria" that even the most optimistic had not dreamed of (Bekis, Nour El Dine (2020), p. 61). It also served as an ideological indicator evaluating the acceptance of women in the public sphere—historically a male-dominated domain—generating social perceptions regarding the

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

Hirak's trajectory and potential societal, governance, and legislative transformations regarding family and women's rights. Conversely, that day marked the launch of deliberate or accidental defamation campaigns against the movement. The marches of that day were so distinctive they remain anchored in the collective social memory; crowds were tightly packed, moving slowly due to the massive density. Some participants wore the traditional Haik, symbolizing authentic Algerian identity and giving meaning to cultural and social life free from external alienation (Mohamed Mebtoul, (2019), pp. 74-75).

-Challenges Facing the Feminist Movement in the Peaceful Hirak Demonstrations

Regarding the emergence and participation of the feminist movement, women's initial presence on February 22 was cautious due to apprehension, with a striking presence commencing on March 8. Following the subsequent Friday march, feminist activists who had participated individually in anti-fifth term protests met to discuss the Hirak and how to leverage it for their demands. They and feminist Hirak associations prepared activities for International Women's Day, preparing banners demanding the abolition of the Family Code and advocating for gender equality, establishing a launch point for the feminist march to assert their presence. On March 8, the march commenced from Mohamed V Boulevard toward Audin Square, finding themselves amidst massive crowds. They noted women were present in dense, mixed blocks, but feminists themselves were few and invisible, attempting to remain in a cohesive bloc but failing, scattering before regrouping and marching side by side (Ben Azzouz, Asma (2022), pp. 8-55).

Subsequently, at the feminist coalition headquarters during a meeting attended by activists across generations and cities, they decided to establish the "**Feminist Square**" (Al-Morabba' Al-Nisa'i) in Algiers due to several considerations:

- On Friday, March 29, despite criticisms targeting the bloc, women held their ground and grew in numbers.

- For the April 5 march, friends urged feminist activists not to take to the streets, but they refused, unwilling to leave their square vacant or risk women arriving to support them facing violence. They marched that day, deciding not to chant feminist slogans, remaining together to prove their existence and rejection of eviction. Over time and through dialogue, the bloc and movement integrated into the Hirak (Ben Azzouz, Asma, 2022, pp. 8-55).

- **Other Challenges Facing Female Activists and Protesters in the Hirak:**
 Female Hirak activists faced harassment from some activists, particularly in the diaspora, reaching the point of blackmail and accusations of embezzling funds

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

collected for detainees' families, or collaborating with Algerian security services to compromise activists. Furthermore, female activists endured stigmas attached to popular protests, especially in the final stages—stigmas attacking their honor, exploited by some to critique the Algerian mindset that views the mixing of men and women in tight spaces as violating traditional modesty (Hormah). This mixing led a faction of scholars (Ulema) to prohibit demonstrations entirely, or set it as a strict condition for permissibility for another faction. Nevertheless, female activists did not capitulate, continuing their participation in legitimate peaceful protests, proving their presence was strictly for struggle while adhering to moral codes, which remain relative among protester groups.

Regarding detentions and arrests, women were initially excluded during early Hirak sweeps. Over time, however, detentions and arrests occurred in Algiers and other cities. Although the National Security Directorate assigns female officers to these tasks to respect the privacy of Muslim Algerian women, this was not fully maintained in the field; instances of violence, beating, and tear-gassing of female protesters and students occurred during escalations to block protesters from advancing toward government buildings or to clear roads. The security apparatus strove to clarify facts; the National Security Directorate rushed to explain an incident on election day (December 12), where a viral video showed a well-built officer kicking a young female protester, knocking her down violently, and walking away.

The General Directorate for National Security issued a statement urging social media users to exercise caution regarding old images and videos circulated to mislead public opinion and harm the police institution, asserting the videos contained false information (FAKE NEWS) or occurred abroad, promising judicial prosecution for distributors. The statement noted that police forces perform their constitutional duties firmly, strictly respecting republican laws and human rights principles (**National Security Directorate Statement, April 12, (2019)**). Detained female activists received widespread solidarity among Hirak ranks, especially those mistreated or elderly.

Relationships between security forces and female protesters generally maintained mutual respect and understanding, punctuated by tension; officers often used familial terms like "My mother" (Yemma), "My sister" (Khti), or "My daughter" (Binti) to communicate during road clearances, and female protesters turned to them when facing harassment or phone theft.

During the popular Hirak, the multi-faceted role of Algerian women emerged clearly—encompassing participation, organization, coordination, mobilization, support, and solidarity. This role acted as an extension of her role within the family and society; since the Hirak aimed to halt transgressions affecting society and citizens

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

across spheres, she worked toward solving those problems, establishing social sovereignty, improving social conditions, and protecting national unity.

▪ **Conclusion:**

What was observed through what Asma Ben Azzouz, Jalali Belkacem Mohamed and Mebtoul Mohamed noted about the participation of Algerian women in the marches is that, in addition to the interactions and emotions that occur during the peaceful demonstrations in Algerian cities resulting from the act of demonstrating and the nature of the roles and the relationship between the demonstrators, and the relationship between them and other individuals or elements in the demonstration process, such as journalists, spectators, and especially policemen and security forces, the participation of Algerian women cultivates a set of values, such as the emotional value of creating a family atmosphere, warmth, and joy during the demonstration, and the sentimental value of prayers and wishes expressed by the female demonstrators, especially the elderly, which raises the morale of the demonstrators and others present in the demonstration process, the value of caring for others, such as offering advice, encouragement, and checking on the condition of the participants and detainees, the value of generosity and magnanimity, a moral value, the value of gratitude, and an aesthetic value. The values of calming tempers and commanding respect through their presence, the value of patience in enduring the psychological harm resulting from smear campaigns and stigmatization targeting their reputations and the accusations leveled against them, the value of steadfastness and defiance in the face of any attempt to dissuade them from participating in demonstrations, the characteristic of participation, unity, cohesion, and solidarity as effective and crucial social actions for building any protest or social movement, and even for building society itself, the characteristic of resistance in upholding the right to demonstrate, the characteristic of being able to organize, lead, and participate in legitimate peaceful demonstrations, the characteristic of learning from experiences, and the characteristic of flexibility and adaptation to field conditions.

All of this strengthened social bonds within the demonstrations and infused them with a sense of emotion, compassion, and psychological comfort.

- The participation of Algerian women in demonstrations at a specific time and their withdrawal from them at the appropriate time and their avoidance of participating in certain demonstrations, i.e., they select and choose the nature of the demonstration, as happened in the demonstrations of the popular movement, as soon as the polarization from various sides doubled, and it was possible to achieve some of the goals of the movement, immediately after the presidential elections and in the midst of changing perceptions towards the nature of the popular movement, and growing vigilance and caution from what became clear as a reality that there are political activists and fighters seeking to exploit the movement in order to pass their goals that contradict the constants

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
---	--	---	-------------------------

of the Algerian nation, and she expressed her fears and objection to the exploitation of the Algerian popular movement and the psyche of society and the state of anger and tension by external parties. This clearly demonstrates that Algerian women, during demonstrations, and in the event of their decision to withdraw or not participate in others as a reaction to unacceptable actions, statements, speeches, or slogans, are in fact forming or contributing to the formation of a protective shield for social cohesion, national unity, the nation's fundamental principles, national security, and their own identity and value in society. It also reveals their awareness of reality, their experience, and their familiarity with the experiences of the Algerian street in demonstrations since the 1980s, as well as with the experiences of the Arab street in what is known as the Arab Spring revolutions, and the street in Eastern European countries and elsewhere in what are known as the color revolutions. They are not tools, nor do they allow themselves to be exploited as human shields for orchestrated marches.

Herein lies the role of women in the protest process: vigilance, caution, and raising awareness of the need to protect protests from any exploitation, manipulation, or deviation from their declared and agreed-upon objectives. They also protect the unity, cohesion, safety, and freedom of the demonstrators.

-Women's participation in peaceful demonstrations and protests in Algerian cities fosters a sense of national belonging, love of country, and the necessity of preserving unity, which strengthens national unity.

-Women's role as social actors in peaceful demonstrations and protests in Algerian cities is an extension of their role in society. By raising concerns and issues that affect them and their fellow citizens, they contribute to improving the social situation. Ultimately, the values and roles injected by women into legitimate peaceful city protests represent but a fraction of her broader impact; her presence imparts structural weight and value, anchoring peacefulness, resisting difficulties, and striving for social improvement and national cohesion. However, given women's specific status and the intersection of her protest role with values of honor and chastity, all organizing parties, civil actors, and law enforcement forces managing gatherings must guarantee a safe, civilized protest environment to ensure the safety of all, especially the female element.

As demonstrated regarding the risks facing female protesters—whether affiliated with social movements, feminist groups, political parties, or participating spontaneously—protest action in Arab and conservative societies requires caution. Women face social control pressures defining street boundaries on one hand, and the latent risk of peaceful venues transforming into unsafe zones due to riots, vandalism, theft, or violent clashes with law enforcement on the other. Furthermore, in conservative

The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
--	--	--	-------------------------

societies, women's presence can be exploited by domestic or external factions seeking to inject ideologies contradicting prevailing social values. Therefore, it is crucial to sustain awareness campaigns to prevent the exploitation of women to introduce mindsets alien to Algerian society and values, while penalizing any violations or defamation targeting their honor through robust penal legislation.

Finally, In reality, the values women bring to peaceful and legitimate demonstrations and protests in cities, and the importance of their role, represent only a small part of the value and weight their presence carries. Whether participating temporarily in protest movements or as ongoing activists, women are keen to ensure these demonstrations remain peaceful and that they do not succumb to challenges and difficulties. Through these actions, they contribute to improving social conditions and strengthening national unity. Women's role in demonstrations is not merely symbolic, nor is it intended to promote a particular image of society or simply to increase participation. Just as women have a qualitative and essential role in society, their role in demonstrations is equally qualitative and significant.

▪ **Practical Suggestions:**

1. Caution should be exercised when women attend demonstrations and peaceful marches, especially in Arab societies, as they represent an opportunity for internal or external groups that seek to exploit public unrest to promote ideologies that conflict with the prevailing ideologies in their societies and attempt to change their values.
2. It is important to continue raising awareness and maintaining vigilance to prevent the exploitation of women during demonstrations to promote ideas alien to their society and the values of Algerian women
3. It is essential to prevent defamation and attacks on their honor by opponents of demonstrations, and furthermore, a specific law should be enacted to punish any violations against women during demonstrations.
4. The importance of educating women not to be enthusiastic about or participate in any march or protest aimed at demanding improved living conditions or rights, without knowing who is behind it, so that it does not become a cause of societal unrest and slide into a dead end fueled by conflict, hatred, and division among members of the same people.

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The Title of the Article: Woman, Demonstrations, and Peaceful Protests: Roles and Values in the Algerian City.	The Author 1: Sara Mameri The Author 2: Malika Khaous	Volume : 14 / Issue : 01 (28) / 2026	Pages : 295- 312
--	--	--	-------------------------

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